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ABSTRACT

Rather than just examine surface problems, a more productive inquiry into social studies teacher education is to examine the structure and internal processes of teacher education. When probing beneath the surface and looking within, teacher educators see three unflattering images: misplaced martyrdom, myth maintenance, and woe-is-meism. Misplaced martyrdom refers to the belief among college and university teacher educators that their success efforts to foster the development of progressive teachers are reversed by the overwhelmingly traditional impact of the school setting and teacher experience. Myth maintenance refers to the idea that teaching is necessarily highly idiosyncratic; there is no professional knowledge on which teaching theory and practice can and should be based. A cruder form is that teaching is simply doing whatever works for you. Woe-is-meism is the self-pity or despair felt when, for example, students do not evidence desired skills or attitudes. Although probing beneath the surface may be discomforting, it can encourage meaningful inquiry and change. Hopefully, these reflections will encourage further examination of the beliefs that form the ideational context of social studies teacher education and shape its particular features and practices. (Author/NE)

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Mirroring Ourselves: Reflections on Social Studies Teacher Education*

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The hard times facing teacher education seem likely to continue well into the 1980s. Teacher educators are confronted with declining enrollments, even more severe budget cutbacks, and ill defined but insistent demands for accountability, which, presumably, we are far from meeting. It is inappropriate to blame current programs for today's school problems since most practicing teachers were educated five or more years ago, and teacher preparation programs are only one of several influences on teacher performance and student outcomes.[1] Yet, there are problems within teacher education. The current situation provides opportunity and incentive for self-examination and improvement efforts.

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For the most part, teacher educators have focused their research on settings and subjects other than their own (to social studies teachers, students, and instruction in elementary and secondary schools but rarely to social studies teacher educators, programs, or students). Our improvement efforts have more often been stimulated by external pressures (e.g., more field experience) and legislative or accreditation mandates (e.g., reading, mainstreaming, multiculturalism), the availability of funding (e.g., CBTE), and more or less informed institution (e.g., performing arts requirements) than by existing research or our own scholarly inquiries.

What might be found if we directed our research energies toward ourselves? What is found and the implications depend in part on our orientation and the nature of our search. Teacher education research has been described as superficial and bland (Popkewitz, Tabachnick, & Zeichner, 1979). It has generally been disappointingly unhelpful, providing neither guidelines for practice nor interpretive schemata that might suggest possibilities for improvement. Toward alternative and hopefully more productive inquiries into social studies teacher education, imagine a three-dimensional mirror, one which allows us to see beneath surface features to deeper structures and internal processes. Imagine also that this

mirror is turned on social studies teacher education. What might be seen? Among other things, I see images of misplaced martyrdom, myth maintenance, and woe-is-meism.

Misplaced martyrdom refers to the widespread belief among college and university teacher educators that their largely successful efforts to foster the development of progressive teachers are reversed by the overwhelmingly traditional impact of the school settings and teacher experience. Progressive variously means humanistic, empathic, creative, flexible, and reflective teaching whereas traditional connotes teaching that is custodial, insensitive, bureaucratic, mechanical, and dogmatic. Prospective teachers are seen as moving toward more progressive orientations during their professional education and then regressing toward traditional beliefs and practices as early as student teaching (Zeichner, 1980; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981b) -- thus, the martyrdom of teacher educators who see their good works undone.

The notion that such martyrdom is misplaced is derived from data that suggest that the impact of university teacher education programs is (a) negligible, or (b) consistent with prospective teachers' prior and subsequent school experiences. The negligible impact position is forcefully presented by Lortie (1975). His research indicates that the years prospective teachers spend as students constitute a potent "apprenticeship of observation" that is traditional in orientation.

Although the orientation engendered by this apprenticeship may remain latent during professional education experiences, it emerges during student-teaching as a powerful influence on beliefs and practices. Data supporting this interpretation have been summarized by Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981b). Essentially, the data suggest that apparent changes in orientation during teacher preparation are superficial and affect relatively few attitudes. Observed changes appear to reflect impression management or strategic compliance with perceived expectations of the university setting.[2] In other words, prospective teachers seem to go along with the orientations advocated in teacher education but tend not to make them their own.

In the words of one prospective teacher, "I work out what they (university personnel) want and give it to them, but I keep what I really believe to myself" (Bartholomew, 1976, p. 118). Teacher education may seem to have little or no impact insofar as it is compatible with prospective teachers' prior and subsequent school experiences. In this case, any influence of professional preparation on teachers' orientations would be virtually indistinguishable from the influence of their "apprenticeship of observation" and their own classroom teaching. Instead of ineffectually progressive, teacher education may be effectively traditional. Representative of this position is Bartholomew's (1976) analysis of

the gap between theory and practice -- a gap not between the theory of the university and school practice as commonly assumed, but between theory (or professed ideals) and practice within the university. Although based on teacher education in the United Kingdom, Bartholomew's observations seem quite relevant to the United States. The heart of his argument is that most teacher education programs are characterized by a separation of theory and practice. Although the rhetoric of teacher preparation may be progressive, its practices are overwhelmingly traditional. Thus, prospective teachers are provided with a model that voices progressive beliefs and ideals while engaging in traditional practices.[3]

In social studies teacher education, for example, to what extent do we model and directly help prospective teachers develop empathy and respect for other people and cultures? What practical classroom strategies do we offer and demonstrate that are consistent with these goals? In methods classes, how often do we engage students in issue-focused inquiry? To what extent are reading assignments introduced and followed up so as to facilitate prospective teachers' reading comprehension and critical evaluation of ideas? How are they assisted in reflecting on and integrating their university classroom and school practicum experiences?

What prospective teachers may be learning during their professional preparation is how to better express

progressive ideals. There is little evidence that many receive assistance in implementing them. Tabachnick, Popkewitz, and Zeichner (1979-80), for example, in examining their own student-teaching program at the University of Wisconsin, found that despite professed support for the program's reflective teaching orientation, most university supervisors encouraged student teachers to accept and go along with the expectations of their cooperating teachers and schools. Rather than encouraging student teachers to consider what they were doing and why, the emphasis in weekly seminars and supervisory conferences tended to be on procedures and teaching techniques, with university supervisors encouraging student-teachers to conform to existing school patterns. These university teacher educators' actions served to legitimize and perpetuate traditional school practices. Tabachnick et al. concluded that "instead of responsibility and reflection, the actions of university personnel encouraged acquiescence and conformity to existing school routines. . . . Contrary to popular belief, the university and schools were not in competition with each other for the hearts and minds of students; instead they collaborated closely with one another to create a powerful conservative force for defending existing institutional arrangements from close scrutiny and challenge. . . . Both institutions talk about thoughtfulness in the making of professional decisions, but as we have seen, those verbal

statements are often contradicted by pressures to meet time constraints and by an emphasis upon meeting immediate demands for classroom decisions about actions which will control children even if they do not enlighten them" (Tabachnick et al., 1979-80, pp. 22-23).

To what extent do we mask our traditional practices with progressive language, thus misleading ourselves, minimizing our credibility, and contributing to the maintenance of traditional school practices?

It is important to note that, in the Tabachnick et al. (1979-80) study and a more recent investigation of student teachers' and university supervisors' perspectives (Zeichner and Tabachnick, 1981a), a minority of the supervisors did evidence the critical orientation espoused by the university program. In other words, continuity between progressive theory (or ideals) and practice is possible within and between schools and universities. How it might be fostered deserves considered action if progressive intentions are to be taken seriously. Meanwhile, blaming traditional schools for undoing progressive teacher education constitutes misplaced martyrdom, which is counterproductive and, seemingly, absurd.

The second image reflected by the three-dimensional mirror is that of myth maintenance. The myth is that teaching is necessarily highly idiosyncratic, that there is no professional knowledge on which teaching theory and practice can and

should be based. This myth is well illustrated by the following excerpt from a student teaching seminar where one student teacher challenged another who required pupils "to write specific amounts of words and then gave points for completion."

> Student: 'My main gripe. . .you say kids learn in their own ways. But you require everyone to write the same number of words in their journal.'
> A silence overcame the group and then, relieving the tension, the student said, 'Oh well, everyone has their own style.'
> Supervisor: 'That's a nice summary.' (Tabachnick et al., 1979-80, p. 21).

In its more elaborate form, the idiosyncracy myth portrays teaching as mystical art. A cruder form is that teaching is simply "whatever works for you." Neither version acknowledges that teaching can be personalized without becoming idiosyncratic -- that successful teaching involves both learned skills or procedures and conceptualization and judgment.[4] However reasonable the myth might have been at some time past, it is no longer tenable.

In the 1960s through the mid-1970s, it was commonplace for reviewers to decry the form and substance of educational research. While that gloom may have been deserved, it is also likely, as Wiley (1977) suggests in her review of

20 years of (reviews of) social studies research, that reviewers had yet to adequately organize, interpret, and synthesize existing research. That situation has changed as a result of more productive research and/or more perceptive reviewers.[5]

There is a growing mass of dependable information on which to base classroom instruction and teacher education. And that mass is being given meaningful shape and texture. Reviewing recent research on teaching, Gage (1978) concludes that

> research on teaching has indeed yielded some statistically significant, or nonchance, clusters of results...we may now rid ourselves of the pessimism about process-product relationships so often expressed in previous characterizations of the literature. We do have some relationships between teacher behavior and pupil achievement and attitudes on which a scientific basis for the art of teaching may be erected. (p. 30)

To those who are critical of the methodology and consequently the results of many of these studies, Gage responds that

> the path to increasing certainty becomes not the single excellent study, which is nonetheless weak in one or more respects, but the convergence of findings from many studies, which are also weak but in many different ways. The dissimilar, or nonreplicated, weaknesses leave the replicated finding more secure. Where the studies do not overlap in their flaws but do overlap in their implications, the research synthesizer can begin to build confidence in those implications. (p. 35)

From his review of more than 250 studies of teaching Medley (1977) concludes that "where sufficient effort and

resources have been applied to the study of teacher effectiveness, useful and dependable findings have emerged" (p. 22) and that "no serious student of teaching can afford to be ignorant of the findings" (p. 4). He argues that "while we do not have enough facts, it is still important to disseminate what facts there are and so reduce our ignorance" (p. 3); the absence of a "complete understanding of the dynamics of effective teaching" does not mean that we should "ignore the imperfect knowledge that we do possess" (p. 3).

Echoing these themes in his Design for a School of Pedagogy, B.O. Smith (1981) challenges university faculty to build teacher education programs on "knowledge resulting from research" rather than unexamined conventions or well intentioned but ill informed hunches. He suggests that the apparent

> failure of research to make as great an impact upon practice as it might have done is not to be attributed so much to lack of research knowledge as the fact that pedagogical faculties largely ignore research findings as they train school personnel. (p. 54)[6]

Distinguishing between academic and clinical pedagogical knowledge, Smith argues that both have an important role to play in teacher education, the former as a descriptive theoretical context for policy and classroom decision making and the latter as concepts and principles to guide classroom practice. He further argues that "to approach program development by first formulating objectives in a field when its

knowledge is not held in common or mutually understood is likely to be misleading and unproductive[4] (p. 83) insofar as it offers "ends without means" (p. 89). Instead Smith suggests "that we first assemble and organize the knowledge accumulated from almost a century of research, and from that knowledge derive objectives and programs, revising them as further research, program evaluation, and experience indicate" (p. 89).

Hopefully, we have not become so accustomed to inconclusive results and calls for further research that we no longer expect to gain anything of value from research. Given research based concepts and principles that can inform social studies teaching and teacher education, we need and ought not be either ignorant or idiosyncratic.[7] Dispelling the myth of idiosyncracy by what we say and do in teacher education could be a significant step toward integrating theory and practice and thus enhancing the credibility and impact of teacher preparation.

In addition to misplaced martyrdom and myth maintenance, the mirror reflects an image of woe-is-meism. Woe-is-meism is the self-pity or despair felt when, for example, students do not evidence desired skills or attitudes. In this regard also, teacher educators and classroom teachers have much in common (see Bartholomew, 1976, pp. 119-120, for additional illustrations). Clearly, rather than indulging

in self-pity or blaming others, we ought to be drawing on our professional knowledge to devise means of helping students develop communication, reasoning, and social interaction skills.

In social studies methods and other classes, for example, we could provide opportunities for prospective teachers to develop their observation and writing skills by demonstrating the instructional strategies that we urge them to employ with their students. If students have difficulty comparing, applying, or evaluating concepts and principles, what assistance can be offered? How can they be helped to become better able to establish and maintain positive relationships with diverse individuals and groups? Tackling just one source of woe-is-meism (e.g., poor reading comprehension, illogical reasoning, ethnocentrism) could at least blur the images of myth maintenance and misplaced martyrdom, thus raising the possibilities for more promising futures for all of us.[8]

Unflattering images are not the only ones reflected by the mirror. I also see traces of humor, creativity, persistence and flexibility, thoughtfulness, and commitment -- all of which warrant optimism. Probing beneath the surface may be discomforting at times, but also productive of meaningful inquiry and change. Hopefully, these reflections will encourage further examination of the beliefs that form the

ideational context of social studies teacher education and that shape its particular features and practices. What assumptions underlie the everyday activities of social studies teacher education? How valid are they? What are their curricular and social implications? What alternatives are possible and desirable? With fewer students and little or no money to support elaborate new programs, there is time and space to more thoughtfully examine ourselves and create our future.

Notes

1. Teacher education is a convenient target, however. See Cornbleth (1981) and Newsweek, April 27, 1981.
2. See Lacey (1977) regarding strategic compliance and teacher socialization.
3. A similar gap between theory-ideals and practice is evident in the schools. Keddie (1971), for example, illustrates discrepancies between teachers speaking as "educationists" and acting as classroom teachers.
4. This myth is also perpetuated in the school milieu. See Jackson (1968, Ch. 4) and Lortie (1975, Ch. 3).
5. See, for example, Ehman's (1979, 1980) reviews of research on citizenship education and political socialization, Martorella's (1977, 1979) reviews of research on cognitive learning and instruction in social studies, and Tucker's (1977) review of research on social studies teaching and teacher education. Ehman and Hahn (1981), reviewing a broader range of research in social studies education, also provide grounds for optimism.
6. Hunkins (1977, pp. 196-197) has reached similar conclusions with respect to social studies and teacher education.
7. Acknowledging and drawing on the reservoir of dependable information available to us in the design and implementation of teacher education will not, of course, resolve questions such as the goals toward which social studies teaching and teacher education should be directed.

8. Succumbing to woe-is-meism serves, perhaps inadvertently, to perpetuate socioeconomic and other differences among students. To verbally deplore such inequities without acting so as to mitigate them is hypocritical at best.

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